

Retiring county health official on 'UpFront' says she, staff received threats over work to control pandemic

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A county public health officer who is retiring after 40 years of service said she and her staff received threats over their work in trying to control the pandemic.

Gail Scott, who is retiring as Jefferson County's public health director/officer, told WISN-TV's "UpFront" program that she was surprised by the "demoralizing and threatening reactions" from the public. The program is produced in partnership with WisPolitics.com.

"I was threatened with getting fired, I was threatened with gun violence, and we've been threatened that we were going to be taken to court for crimes against humanity," she said.

"We really truly wanted to help the public, and we really truly wanted to stop this virus," Scott said. "And I was kind of surprised at some of the demoralizing and threatening reactions that we got.

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, "What really hurt is when people said we were lying. Because we were not lying. We were not trying to control anybody. Public health has no desire to do that. We were just trying to do our jobs," Scott said.

Scott said she and her staff did see some positive public reaction, such as when they held a mass vaccination clinic and 500 volunteers came to help. She also said other people thanked them and showed appreciation for their work on the

pandemic.

Scott said she is retiring because she is turning 65, and she always planned to retire at that age. She said that although the pandemic was “the hardest I have ever worked in my life” she is leaving “with a smile on my face.”

Also on the program, Wisconsin Revenue Secretary Peter Barca said a UW-Madison economist’s plan to eliminate the personal income tax and raise the state sales tax to offset lost revenue could result in a dramatically higher sales tax that would make Wisconsin’s sales tax the highest in the country.

“We’re always open to any idea,” Barca said. But the plan offered by Noah Williams, director of the Center for Research on the Wisconsin Economy, would require “very careful thought,” Barca said.

“Our revenue experts at the Department of Revenue say we’d have to raise sales tax well over 11 percent to make the numbers work,” Barca said.

Williams’ plan has been championed by several conservative groups. It calls for increasing the state sales tax — now 5 percent — to 8 percent. Williams projected the change would increase employment in the long run, while cutting net state tax revenue by 12.6 percent. The revenue loss would include \$3.5 billion in the first budget that included the elimination, according to the report.

Barca said the state’s economy is strong, and its tax ranking has fallen from No. 5 20 years ago to 23rd highest among states today.

Barca said the state’s grant program for pandemic relief, made possible by federal funds, has made a difference.

“We’re in a very good position,” Barca said.

In another segment, a Waukesha County community leader said the first payments have been made to victims of the Christmas parade tragedy.

The payments came from the more than \$5 million donated after the tragedy. On Nov. 21, police say a man with a lengthy criminal record drove an SUV through closed-off streets in downtown Waukesha, directly into the parade. Six people died, and dozens were injured.

Shelli Marquardt, president of the Waukesha County Community Foundation, said the first payments went to the families of the people killed, and those with the longest hospitalizations. The next round will go to people who were injured.

People hurt in the event have until the end of February to apply, she said.

Marquardt said the foundation is following a formula developed in other communities that suffered horrific tragedies, like the Boston Marathon bombing and the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando.

She said the donations, which have come from every state and even from around the world, are heartwarming.

“It is inspiring and if there is any kind of silver lining, it is the love, the support, the generosity that’s been wrapped around our community,” Marquardt said.

See more from the [program](#).